



# Inside Congress

*by United States Representative George R. Nethercutt, Jr.*

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**For the week ending May 17, 2002**

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Welcome to this week's edition of Inside Congress. I am glad to share with you a little of my work in the national legislature. Please follow the listed links or contact my office for more information on the topics mentioned here.

## **NATIONAL GUARD TROOPS SHOULD BE HOUSED IN STATE**

This week I sent a letter to Brig. Gen. Lee Legowik, assistant adjutant general of the Washington Army National Guard, asking that the National Guard reconsider its decision to house soldiers stationed along the northern border in Canada. I am informed that the decision to house these soldiers in Canadian motels was made out of concern for the safety of personnel driving late at night. I certainly appreciate the importance of ensuring the safety of personnel, and agree that roads along the northern border can be hazardous, particularly during the winter months. But I also believe that the National Guard has an obligation to procure services from within the United States, whenever possible. To do otherwise undercuts the strong support of taxpayers for the Guard, and creates an unnecessary source of friction between citizen-soldiers and the community. In addition, I believe the spending by guard personnel for meals and lodging could give a boost to the struggling economies in the northern part of the state that are facing double-digit unemployment rates.

## **LEGISLATION WOULD RESTORE HIGHWAY FUNDING TO OUR STATE**

One of the bills I voted for this week authorizes funding to make up for billions in proposed highway funding shortfalls that would cost Washington state \$125 million.

The **Highway Funding Restoration Act** would increase the authorized level of highway funding in Washington for fiscal year 2003 to \$442 million – a \$74 million increase over the president's budget recommendation, and the amount anticipated by a prior transportation authorization bill.

Highway Trust Fund distributions provided to each state are linked to gas tax receipts. This year, trust fund receipts are down, meaning the proposed 2003 total highway funding levels will be cut more than \$8 billion from 2002 levels.

Our state has dire transportation needs right now. Restoring this funding keeps us on the road to improving our economy and quality of life in Washington state.

Local highway projects that have received Highway Trust Funds include: expanding I-90 through Spokane, initial planning and construction of the North Spokane Freeway.

### **THINKING ABOUT THE FUTURE OF U.S.-CUBA POLICY**

This week, the Cuba Working Group that I helped found, released a review of what we believe the future U.S. policy toward Cuba should look like. Our bipartisan group, in our common goal of ending Communist rule on the island and establishing a democratic government, strongly believes that policy of the last forty years has failed. The Trade Sanctions Reform Act that I sponsored two years ago, authorizing sales of food and medicine to Cuba, opened the door to thinking about a new relationship with the people of Cuba. Our policy review can be read at: <http://www.house.gov/nethercutt/report.doc>. You can read my comments at the press conference at: <http://www.house.gov/nethercutt/cubarelease.doc>

### **APPLICATIONS BEING ACCEPTED FOR AIRPORT SCREENING POSITIONS**

This week the Transportation Security Administration is re-opening the airport screener position announcement to accept both full, and now part-time applications on an open and continuous basis at four locations, including Spokane. More information can be found at: [www.tsa.dot.gov](http://www.tsa.dot.gov)

### **LEGISLATION**

This week I became a cosponsor of **H.R. 2637**, introduced by Rep. Frank Lobiondo of New Jersey. This legislation would authorize funding to: (1) the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development for specified urban empowerment zones; and (2) the Secretary of Agriculture for specified **rural empowerment zones** and **rural enterprise communities**. This bill would permit use of such funds for zone or community strategic plan implementation and use of federal funds to pay matching fund requirements. This legislation would assist the Tri-County Empowerment Zone (Ferry, Okanogan, Pend Oreille and Stevens counties) in obtaining additional funding.

I also became a cosponsor of **H.R. 4668** encouraging investment in renewable energy resources introduced by Rep. Duncan Hunter of California.

Solar, wind, hydropower, biomass and geothermal energy are each potentially enormous and relatively untapped energy resources. Every state has renewable energy potential, but some states' resources are more suited to wind energy, others to biomass. Renewable resources vary from region to region. Current tax

law creates regional and technological inequities by failing to provide uniform benefits for all renewable energy resources. This bill seeks to fix that inequity.

I signed a letter to Ways and Means Committee Chairman Thomas in support of providing tradable tax credits for clean and renewable energy products in H.R. 4. This provision would allow public power and rural cooperatives a similar benefit as is currently enjoyed by Investor-Owned Utilities (IOUs) that invest in clean and renewable energy.

## **ON THE FLOOR**

Here is a recap of the legislative activity for the week:

**H.R. 3694 -- Highway Funding Restoration Act.** It passed by a vote of 410 – 5. I voted yes. Please see article on page 1 for more information.

**H.R. 4069 -- Social Security Benefit Enhancements for Women Act of 2002.** It passed by a vote of 418 – 0. I voted yes.

This legislation improves fairness and updates benefit eligibility requirements, resulting in higher benefits and expanded eligibility for elderly and disabled widows and divorced spouses, who are among the most likely to live in poverty. Once implemented, over 120,000 women will see enhancements. Specifically, the measure:

- increases the unfair benefit limit on widows whose spouses both retire and die before the full retirement age;
- updates eligibility requirements for disabled widows to ensure consistency with earnings requirements in current law; and
- eliminates a needless two-year wait for some divorced spouses to receive benefits.

**H.R. 4714** – This measure prohibits members of the Armed Forces in Saudi Arabia from being required or formally compelled to wear the abaya garment. The bill passed by a voice vote. I voted yes.

The abaya is a traditional Muslim garment that covers their head, face and body. While serving in Saudi Arabia, women in our Armed Forces have been strongly encouraged to wear the garment. Lt. Col. Martha McSally, the first U.S. woman ever to fly a combat mission, filed suit in U.S. District Court last year to force the Department of Defense to end this policy. This legislation prohibits the military from requiring or otherwise encouraging American servicewomen in Saudi Arabia to wear abayas and prohibits adverse action against a servicemember for choosing not to wear an abaya. The amendment would also provide for

education to Armed Forces members ordered to duty in Saudi Arabia on these prohibitions.

**H.R. 4737 -- Personal Responsibility, Work, and Family Promotion Act.** The bill passed by a vote of 229-197. I voted yes.

This legislation helps improve the welfare system and help families work toward independence by:

- Helping more welfare recipients achieve independence through work.
- Providing an additional \$2 billion for child care over the next five years.
- Allowing states more flexibility in using Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) funds, Food Stamps, public housing, Workforce Investment Act, and child care, among other programs.
- Enhancing State flexibility by maintaining and updating current incentives to reduce caseloads and count those reductions toward State work requirements, among other changes.
- Supporting further declines in poverty through job preparation, work, and marriage.

### **CONTACT INFORMATION:**

I always enjoy hearing from you. Please feel free to contact me if I can be of assistance to you in any matter. Here are some of the ways you may reach me, especially if you know of others who may want to receive this report each week:

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